ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

First pictures are coded by a variable picture rate coding, the first pictures being set at a predetermined interval, to be used as reference pictures for inter-picture prediction of an incoming moving picture and second pictures different from the first pictures are coded. The first pictures are coded by intra-picture coding or unidirectional inter-picture predictive coding, thus obtaining a first bitstream. A coding picture rate is set in accordance with motion activity of the incoming moving picture. Pictures that have remained after decimation of the second pictures are coded in accordance with the picture rate by bidirectional inter-picture predictive coding using the first pictures or locally-decoded pictures of the first pictures as the reference pictures, thus obtaining a second bitstream. The first and the second bitstreams and data indicating the picture rate are multiplexed.